

SISTERS DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

For *The Huntsman: Winter's War*, Jessica Chastain was empowered both by the strong roles for its female stars and the chance to seriously kick ass. Words: Adam Colby

Although the heroine of *Snow White and the Huntsman* is not around this time, there is no shortage of strong female characters in this prequel/sequel. As well as villains Freya (Emily Blunt) and Ravena (Charlize Theron), there is also a new lethal warrior in the shape of Sara, played by Jessica Chastain. There's even room for two feisty dwarfs in Mrs. Bromwyn (Sheridan Smith) and Doreena (Alexandra Roach).

And for the star of *Zero Dark Thirty* and *The*

Martian, the plethora of great parts for women was one of the main attractions for Chastain signing on for *The Huntsman: Winter's War*.

"One of the main reasons I wanted to do the film – in addition to working with Chris [Hemsworth, who plays the titular character Eric] – was that it showcased incredible parts for women," she says. "I knew Charlize and Emily were attached when I got the script – and I'm tired of being the only woman on a set! Stories, even fantasy like this, should

BLUNT TALKING

Unlike the tragic Elsa in *Frozen*, Freya the snow queen in *The Huntsman: Winter's War* is a pretty nasty piece of work.

However, Emily Blunt insists that she is not all bad. "Freya's an interesting villain because who you meet at the beginning of the film is not who she becomes," the British actress says. "When you meet her, she's this

incredibly kind person. She's a young girl who's in love with the wrong guy, but then she loses her child and becomes so grief-stricken and hardened by the loss that she discovers her power.

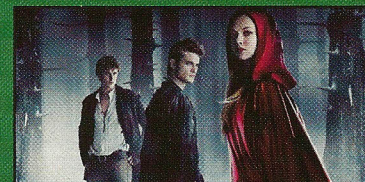
"Freya was an emotionally complex villain; I knew that the part was something I could bite into and one that would stretch me."



FAIRYTALES REIMAGINED

RED RIDING HOOD (2011)

Catherine Hardwicke directed the first *Twilight* movie, so this reboot is unsurprisingly big on thwarted adolescent romance and angst. Amanda Seyfried is the lady in red.



HANSEL & GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS (2013)

In the hands of cult Norwegian director Tommy Wirkola (*Dead Snow*), the scared little children of the original fairytale are transformed into grown-up kick-ass warriors.



JACK THE GIANT SLAYER (2013)

A 3D fantasy adventure that's full of beans; Nicholas Hoult plays the eponymous peasant boy who climbs a stalk and becomes a princess-rescuing hero.



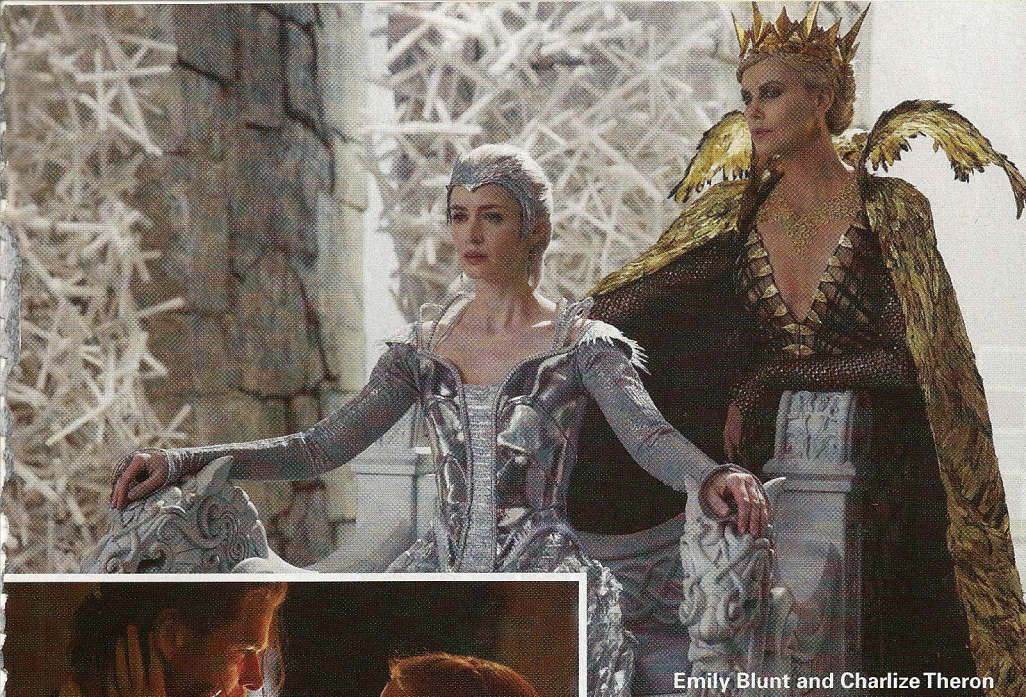
OZ THE GREAT AND POWERFUL (2013)

Not strictly a fairytale but Sam Raimi's flamboyant fantasy prequel to *The Wizard of Oz* offers a fresh interpretation of a beloved, enchanted world.



MALEFICENT (2014)

The ultimate wicked fairy godmother of fairytale lore is cast in considerably more sympathetic light in this *Sleeping Beauty* reboot, which stars Angelina Jolie in the title role.



Emily Blunt and Charlize Theron



Chris Hemsworth and Jessica Chastain

represent our world, and I was really, really pleased with the fabulous roles for women that were written into this film."

The star also identified with her character immediately. Both an origin story and a continuation of the first film, we first meet Sara when she is fighting alongside Eric as one of Freya's lethal Huntsmen. But when the evil ruler discovers that the pair have fallen for one another, she tricks Eric into thinking Sara has been killed, thus setting in motion the events of *Snow White and the Huntsman*.

But when Eric and Sara are finally

reunited, it becomes apparent that she, too, has been deceived by her queen. She finds it impossible to believe that Eric has remained true to her all these years apart, and refuses to forgive him for what she believes he once did.

"She's trying to figure out if she's worthy enough to be loved," explains Chastain of her character. "That's a

big hurdle for her, and she has a lot of trust issues to overcome. I liked where she began and where she ended, and I liked the secrets she holds. It was a character I'd never played before."

At the same time, she was conscious that it was important for the character to come across as being real, even though it was a fantasy film. Fortunately, she quickly discovered that first time director Cedric Nicolas-Troyan was more than happy to accommodate her.

"Reality is the most important thing when I approach a character, she says. "But Cedric listened and inspired me, and he would say something that led my character in a new direction. When I asked a question, he'd listen and build on that."

The other main draw of the movie for Chastain was the chance to play a warrior. Her co-star Hemsworth jokes that her first question to him was: "Do I get to kick ass in this movie?"

The answer was a resounding yes, much to the actress's delight. "We worked for a few weeks with the stunt team to learn the fights," Chastain recalls. "I had so much fun learning, and I love the weapons I was able to use. I used to be a dancer, so it was great to work on the fighting because it felt like choreography – just like doing a dance."

"I like the physicality, and I've done a lot of films that are dark and heavy, so I wanted to do something where I'm having a good time. This might be the most fun I've ever had." **S**

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• *The Huntsman: Winter's War* is out Aug 4